Jordan Manning

EDUC 530—Technology

Spring 2018

**Digital Learners—Today’s Students**

I like to think of myself as a digital native; however, my students truly know more than I do about the technology we use in the classroom. We are in the digital age whether we like it or not—its here and happening. We, as educators, must stay up to date in the realm of technology for the sake of our students. Our students are wired differently than ever before; therefore we cannot keep teaching them the way we used to and expect them to excel. The future is in our classrooms, and we must prepare them to lead us into the digitals ages to come.

Students today learn differently than I did. I was brought up in a paper/pencil/chalkboard/worksheet age of learning. We learned from a chalkboard, only visited the computer lab for keyboarding lessons, and rarely supplemented learning with anything but book work. I am not saying that book work does not get the job done; there are just so many more options available today. In the article written by Marc Prensky (2001) Do They Really Think Differently , he paints the vivid picture of today’s digital learners, “…over 10,000 hours playing video games, over 200,000 emails and instant messages sent and received, over 10,000 hours talking on digital cell-phones, over 20,000 hours watching television, over 500,000 commercials seen---before they leave for college.” He goes on to say that they have spent around 5,000 hours reading books. That is alarming to think of as a school teacher, but the truth nonetheless. Statements like those above should show us as teachers that we need to adapt our way of presenting information to our students. Their brains have been wired to gain information from screens and digital resources like televisions, computers, and tablets. We most definitely have to adjust our way of thinking to meet their classroom needs.

Today’s students have issues with sitting still, being occupied for long periods of time, and focusing. They need instant feedback, constant interaction, and to be entertained. In another article written by Prenksy (2011), The Reformers are Leaving Our Schools in the 20th Century, a professor is quoted in saying the following alarming statement “Sure they have a short attention span----for the old way of learning!” That is what a traditional setting is to these students, boring and outdated. Sitting in rows of desks, doing worksheet after worksheet, taking notes on hour long lectures, and so on—we cannot prepare them for the future this way. They no longer respond to the sit down and be quiet methodology of management, either. We have to reach out not only in the way we deliver our content cognitively, but also in the way we assess them. The move to a technology based curriculum is not as negative and as scary as it may sound—it just requires us to make some changes to our delivery as teachers. It requires a little buy in by older more traditional teachers, but in the long run it will help our students succeed.

The best way we can reach out to our digital learners is to simply join them! We need to stop fighting the use of technology in our classrooms and embrace the doors it opens for us. We can use the concepts of flipped classrooms and create video lecture series. We can use ebooks and tablets to enhance the learning of our students. We can also allow them to use their cellphones for good. By allowing technology into our teaching, we can also show students healthy and safe ways to use technology. We can incorporate more learning games in our classroom. We can allow our students to work with technology more—send emails, make presentations, vlog about the topics they are leaning about. We can use Prensky’s concept of incorporating their knowledge of gaming into classroom learning activities. Having our students design a game based on the concepts we are teaching can tap into that prior knowledge and interest and make the learning worthwhile. Prensky (2011) goes on the say that we need to not only change how we teach concepts, but the concepts being taught as well. He is quoted to say the following, “ …our current and future teachers, with some training, are fully capable of delivering, and will deliver, the education our students so desperately need.” They (our students) need us to change our way of thinking to fit them so we do not leave our future in the past.

It is our job, as educators, to stay up to date on the current ways of our students. We cannot have negative attitudes towards technology or the way our students think because we were not brought up that way. We must prepare our students to embrace technology and not be afraid to learn more as technology advances. Prensky’s articles referenced above allow teachers to see what naysayers feel and state about the use of technology and open up the minds of those in education who want to prepare their students for the future. We have to make sure they are still receiving the best education they can, as well as, reaching out to them in a way that engages them in relevant and relatable styles. The traditional way of teaching and learning is gone, and we owe it to our students and the future to adapt to it. We teach the future, and we cannot prepare them for tomorrow still teaching like it is yesterday.

References

Prensky, M. (2008). Backup Education. Educational Technology, 48(1). Retrieved

February 26, 2017, from file:///C:/Users/Lauren/AppData/Local/Temp/Prensky-

Backup\_Education-EdTech-1-08.pdf.

Prensky, M. (2001). Digital Natives, Digital Immigrants, Part II: Do They Really Think

Differently? On the Horizon , 9(6). Retrieved February 26, 2017, from

file:///C:/Users/Lauren/AppData/Local/Temp/Prensky%20-

%20Digital%20Natives,%20Digital%20Immigrants%20-%20Part2.pdf.

Prensky, M. (2011). The Reformers Are Leaving Our Schools in the 20th Century. SNS

Newsletter. Retrieved February 26, 2017, from

file:///C:/Users/Lauren/AppData/Local/Temp/ Prensky-

The\_Reformers\_Are\_Leaving\_Our\_Schools\_in\_the\_20th\_Century-

please\_distribute\_freely.pdf.